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ABSTRACT

This study was designed as an effort to understand how student-directed small-group discussions can further student thinking about issues related to social studies. The study utilized participant observation to collect data two to three times weekly as students engaged in a literature-based reading program called Book Club. The specific questions the study addressed were: (1) what topics will students be able to pursue as they engage in opportunities to read and discuss trade books that focus on social studies issues; and (2) which issues are better handled through instruction led by the teacher? The study was conducted in an urban school, within two classrooms, one a fourth/fifth-grade split and the other a fifth-grade classroom. Observations were conducted during discussions centered around historical fiction. Early in the unit, students read books about Japanese people and animals before, during, and after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Later in the unit students read about Europe during World War II. The data collected included a series of transcripts of students' oral discussions, field notes, and interviews. Student discussions are analyzed in order to determine the degree to which students had developed certain social studies skills and knowledge. The following skills and knowledge areas are among those on which the study focused: map-reading skills, knowledge of cultural differences, knowledge of weapons, identification with main characters, and empathizing with cultural differences. Findings revealed that (1) students often introduced issues included within the social studies curricula based on their own interests; (2) students were capable of expanding ideas within the Book Club groups; (3) teachers need not dominate student interactions to insure that they comprehend important issues; and (4) instructional support could have furthered students' understanding of some key issues related to social studies education. A list of 52 sources is appended. (DB)

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Classroom Discourse during Social Studies: Students' Purposes and Topics of Interest in Peer-led Discussion Groups

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As reform efforts spread to all areas of the curriculum, those interested in social studies education face unique problems. Like many other subjects, textbook content too often constitutes the curriculum taught; however, unlike other school subjects, social studies incorporates many disciplines, so which of these to include at each grade-level is frequently debated. In an effort to include as much of the information as they can to pleased various disciplines, text authors try to include representative information from many disciplines. Reformers criticize the resulting texts, saying that topics are covered too broadly, activities do not foster critical thinking, and the writing is often unintelligible for the elementary reader (Prawat, Brophy, & McMahon, 1990). In particular, many find the treatment of history as lacking coherence (Moss, 1984; Tyson & Woodward, 1989; Tyson-Bernstein, 1988). One prospective answer to the use of the expansive texts is to incorporate other materials, speakers, and activities to teach the values and skills essential to the social studies curriculum. While supporting alternative means of conveying information, many educators believe that certain aspects of the social studies curriculum, such as history, can only be met through the use of written materials that convey much of the information necessary for understanding. Therefore, to meet the need for incorporating different materials and to make use of other written formats, one suggested way of improving social studies content is to include children's literature as one means through which to read and discuss relevant historical and cultural issues (Brown & Abel, 1982; Freeman & Levstik, 1988; McGowan & Guzzetti, 1991; Riecken & Miller, 1990).

This study explored elementary students' participation in a literature-base reading program. During one unit within this program, children read, wrote about, and discussed historical fiction. While this unit was incorporated within the reading curriculum, it provides evidence that the use of trade books can and does foster greater student discussion and understanding of social studies issues.

Theoretical Perspective

When considering modifications in any instructional context, the theoretical perspective on learning plays an essential role in the decision-making process. Social Constructivism provides a relevant and current perspective on the study of the implementation of a program that includes the reading and discussing of literature. In her landmark text, Louise Rosenblatt (1938) argued for literary experiences that were intense forms of personal activity, not passive ones which assume students merely absorb meaning from their teachers and texts. This viewpoint is consistent with Vygotsky's (1986) emphasis on the importance of focusing on the process of the learner's development, including the role of language on the development of thought. Vygotsky argued that verbal thought resided within the interception of thought and language and that thinking developed as the result of extended interactions within the learner's zone of proximal development. Therefore, to develop their thinking surrounding texts, students need multiple opportunities to engage in discourse. Further, if meanings are constructed within social contexts (Bakhtin, 1986), then the classroom provides a very important setting in which children develop their definitions of social issues and should be considered when investigating any curricular program. While other perspectives consider either the reader or the text, a social constructivist perspective emphasizes the interaction among reader, text, and the social context (Gavelek, 1986), proposing that meaning results from this interaction, rather than existing within any one aspect of it. Thus, rather than being viewed as a potentially "messy" variable that cannot be ignored, the instructional context is recognized as actively contributing to the construction of meaning.

Current instructional contexts for social studies

As educators assess current curriculum within social studies, they find two broad areas impacting instruction which they believe need significant changes: (a) the instructional discourse pattern within most classrooms and (b) the texts used to teach social studies. The next section of the paper discusses each of these issues.

The Discourse Patterns in Traditional Classrooms

Reformers in social studies education argue that the prevalent classroom discourse patterns prohibit authentic conversations. They advocate changing from traditional classroom interactional patterns in two areas: (a) the interaction between the teacher and her class and (b) the interaction among students.

Discourse between the Teacher and Students. Commonly used social studies materials frequently recommend activities which suggested teacher-led discussions focused on factual recall of information instead of extended interactions about ideas or issues related to content (Brophy, McMahon, & Prawat, 1991). Many of the comprehension activities, requiring students to provide answers found in the teacher's edition, lead to interactions in which the teacher dominates much of the discussion, fostering a transmission model of instruction (Barnes, 1976). Such a model includes the teacher asking all the questions and evaluating each student's response. Thus, teachers come to see themselves primarily as evaluators of students' learning, instead of facilitators of it. The student's role is to acquire the knowledge the teacher presents. Such teaching leads to little critical analysis, an important aspect of social studies education (Newmann, 1991).

Textbooks and their accompanying materials play a major role in such interactional patterns since they provide limited scope for the teacher and students (Langer, 1986). This teacher domination through directed instruction and questioning leads to the same recurring pattern: teacher-initiated question, student response, and teacher evaluation (Cazden, 1988; Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Tharpe and Gallimore, 1988). Proponents of literature-based instruction argue that such interactional patterns actually make understanding more difficult (Hynds, 1990) and need to be broken to focus on the reader's experience with the text. Teachers need to ask students open-ended questions that elicit their personal response.

Such changes in interactional patterns in classrooms have support from current research and theory that argue that classroom learning is an extension of earlier learning activities between a parent and child. Such theories support the idea that the teacher's language can function as a

"scaffold" for the learner (Applebee & Langer, 1983; Bruner, 1978; Langer, 1986; Langer & Applebee, 1984). Through the use of interactions that help support student literacy acquisition, teachers can help students develop greater proficiency in reading.

Discourse among students. In addition to changes in the interactional patterns between teachers and students, advocates for change argue that children need opportunities to interact with one another, as well as the teacher, in order to develop their own thinking about texts (Short, 1990; Smith, 1986). This requires a major change since much of the interactions in schools are between the teacher and students, fostering competition among children. Such interactions can be public, as in classroom discussions, or more private, as during individual completion of assigned work. Such interactions do not foster active dialogue among children nor do they create a context in which students can learn from one another (Short, 1990).

To address this needed change, some argue for the use of more student-led discussion groups in which children can interact about ideas. Such settings provide children time to listen to one another instead of just the teacher. These social interactions influence each child's reading and resulting knowledge. Teachers can structure groups so that students take responsibility for their own learning in a collaborative community of readers. Such a community encourages students to participate in on-going conversations, providing a rich context to support discussions about texts (Short, 1990; Smith 1986). While some have studied the use of student groups to teach reading and/or literature (see Cullinan, 1987; McMahon, 1992; Short & Pierce, 1990), little investigation has explored such student groups exploring social studies issues.

Texts Used to Teach Social Studies

A second area of concern among educators is the texts used for instruction of social studies content. These critics argue that students participating in more traditional, instructional programs using these materials do not have sufficient opportunities to read or write extended, authentic texts, noting that these textbooks too frequently: (a) cover more topics than can be understood in depth, (b) are written in a dry, repetitive style, lacking meaningful examples for support, and (c) provide

little information about women and minorities (Tyson-Bernstein, 1988; Woodward, 1987). In addition, Beck, McKeown and their colleagues (Beck, McKeown, & Gromoll, 1989; Beck, McKeown, Sinatra, & Loxterman, in press; McKeown & Beck, 1990; McKeown, Beck, Sinatra, & Loxterman, in press) examined the ease or difficulty of reading elementary social studies texts and found students had difficulties comprehending important issues as a result of: (a) the erroneous assumptions made about student background knowledge and (b) the lack of coherence within the texts. Further, social studies texts often present one "objective" view. Critics argue students need opportunities to see that historical events are the result of conflicting positions (Beck & McKeown, 1991; Levstik, 1990). In summary, critics of social studies textbooks cite four issues of concern: (a) a presentation of breadth over depth, (b) a dry, sometimes incoherent writing style, (c) a lop-sided presentation of historical events, and (d) an insufficient presentation of essential background information.

To address these concerns, as well as others, some have suggested the use of children's literature to teach social studies curriculum, arguing such literature is a better choice than textbooks because it is generally written to convey meaning through a story line with interesting plots fashioned around established story structures (Bruce, 1984; 1985). Further, proponents of the use of trade books in the social studies curriculum argue that historical understanding begins with a narrative that emphasizes human response to an historical event (Egan, 1983) and narratives often provide alternative perspectives to difficult historical issues (Bardige, 1988). In addition to these reasons, advocates for changes in social studies education call for the use of trade books because our society is becoming increasingly diverse; therefore, instruction must meet the needs of all its students by promoting awareness and value of other cultures. Multiethnic literature can help students develop stronger self-concepts (Hittleman, 1978), extend the knowledge base of all students, and decrease negative stereotypes (Norton, 1983).

Incorporating Children's Literature into the Social Studies Curriculum

There are a variety of means through which to incorporate children's literature into the

social studies curriculum: (a) as supplementary readings, (b) as sources to complete information for a topic of study, and (c) as the focus of instruction (Beck & McKeown, 1991). However, little research has explored how effective the inclusion of such texts is on student learning of social studies content.

In classroom studies exploring the use of trade books to teacher history in a fifth-grade social studies class, Levstik (1990) found multiple advantages. First, she found that older elementary students identified with characters in historical fiction and biography. In addition, they also seemed to value the accounts of historical fiction over others, particularly those in textbooks. However, her findings supported Thompson's (1985) concern that trade books are often limited, presenting only one view of an historical event, leaving students with some understanding of this narrow aspect, but not any greater perception of the historical period. The students Levstik studied did not question information found in the trade books so the teachers had to intervene to help them consider alternative perspectives to the literary account and to facilitate more critical thinking when disagreements emerged over the accuracy of an account..

In addition to investigating the use of the trade books, Levstik (1990) also examined student response groups as they read and discussed several books on the same topics. She found that through the use of these groups, learners had several opportunities to revisit ideas regarding historical events and people. As a result, students adjusted their ideas, not just because of the books they read or the instructional focus, but also because of their own discussions.

In other work, Doris Walker-Dalhouse (1992) explored the use of multiethnic literature in a fifth-grade classroom by using fiction and nonfiction trade books in conjunction with classroom themes and the Mifflin Reading Program (Durr, 1989), hoping to promote discourse about other races and cultures. She found that in addition to increased student awareness as evidenced through classroom discussions and written texts, the students were able to apply concepts from the literature to their own lives. Such applications included: (a) solving a problem that resulted on the playground between Hispanic and Caucasian students and (b) welcoming and coming to

understand a new Vietnamese student who entered school later that year. While she found students had gained knowledge and understanding of other cultures, the researcher felt there was much more to do.

While these studies present positive results from using children's literature, further work needs to look more closely at what happens within these small discussion groups when students talk about texts. Such exploration of classroom instruction requires extended classroom observations and documentation of student participation.

The Current Study

The purpose of the current study is to extend efforts to understand how the student-directed small-group discussions can further student thinking about issues related to social studies. To understand elementary students' oral responses to text over time, I examined several transcripts of students' discussions over the course of one year to look at their purposes through the topics they introduced. At the time of the study, these students were participating in classrooms in which the teachers were implementing a literature-based reading program. This program included the use of trade books as texts, written documents reflecting student response to texts, and small-group discussions called "Book Clubs." The specific questions addressed were: (1) What topics will students be able to pursue as they engage in opportunities to read and discuss trade books which focus on social studies issues and (2) which issues are better handled through instruction led by the teacher? The study investigated how student exploration of their own topics demonstrated their interest in pertinent social studies issues within their Book Clubs.

Method

Through the use of participant observation, data was collected two to three times weekly as students engaged in a literature-based reading program called Book Club (McMahon, 1992; Raphael, McMahon, Goatley, Bentley, Boyd, Pardo, & Woodman, 1991). The study was conducted in an urban school, within two classrooms, one a fourth/fifth-grade split and the other a fifth-grade classroom. Both teachers were involved in the study through collecting, discussing,

and analyzing data.

For this study, observations were conducted during discussions around historical fiction. Early in the unit, students read literature about Japanese people and animals before, during, and after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Texts included *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* (Coerr, 1977), *Faithful Elephants* (Tsuchiya, 1988), and *Hiroshima No Pika* (Maruki, 1982). Students read and critiqued the chapter book, *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, over a three-week period, making daily entries in reading logs and discussing their entries in small and large groups. Some time after reading *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, students listened to and read *Hiroshima No Pika* over a two-day period, then repeated a similar schedule for *Faithful Elephants*. Each of these readings was followed by student discussions of the book. After reading all three books set in Japan, students participated in an additional synthesis activity which required other Book Club discussions.

For the subsequent section of the unit, students formed new Book Club groups as their attention shifted to Europe during World War II, reading *Number the Stars* (Lowry, 1989). The class followed a pattern similar to that of *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*. That is, each day they read sections of the book, made entries into their reading logs, and discussed entries in Book Club and as a total class.

Participants

Participants for the study were selected from the fourth- and fifth-grade students in each of the two urban classrooms implementing the Book Club program. All Book Clubs were comprised of students who represented the gender, cultural, ethnic, economic, and academic mix of the classroom. Student discussions were selected while listening to groups interact.

Types of Data Collected

Data collected included a series of transcripts of oral discussions, field notes, and interviews. Field notes were collected twice a week, observing students as they participated in Book Club and whole class discussions. Transcripts were made of each of the Book Club

discussions, then listened to in order to note emerging patterns and themes. Next, they were transcribed professionally. Later, the researcher edited these transcripts for further analysis. To provide additional information about student perceptions of the unit, they were interviewed during and at the end of the unit to explore their thinking behind their comments during discussions.

Data Analyses

Data analyses were ongoing during data collection using methods recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (1982). During data collection, the author met weekly with other researchers and teachers on the project. During the meetings, we focused on the patterns we saw emerging within the Book Club discussions, the relationship of these to patterns we saw in other students' groups, and the potential categories emerging from the data that could help focus questions and further observations and interviews. Then data were considered in terms of social studies issues. Therefore, additional categories were formed considering both Nickerson's (1988) types of knowledge and what Newmann (1991) has identified as "specific social studies problems that challenge students to think..." (p. 388). Thus, concurrently and subsequent to the data collection, data were indexed, sorted, and coded according to the themes and patterns identified.

Social Studies Issues Surfacing During Discussions

Nickerson (1988) identified four types of knowledge identified in student thinking: (a) domain-specific, (b) knowledge of normative principles of reasoning, (c) knowledge of informal principles and tools of thought, and (d) metacognitive knowledge. For this study, these seemed relevant, particularly domain-specific knowledge since this was a reading unit and not directly associated with the social studies curriculum. Therefore, student purposes and the resulting topics of conversation might be impacted by what specific historical facts, principles, and concepts over which they already had mastery.

As fifth-graders discussed notions of war, they had to confront issues related to Nickerson's types of knowledge. They needed facts, concepts, and principles to understand events the books were describing. Often this content was covered in the instructional component

of the program . However, the teacher could not always foresee differences in student knowledge about information presented within the literature. In addition, students also needed to be able to abstract these events to discuss them in broader contexts. Such abstraction required them to develop their knowledge further.

Factual Knowledge and Skills

A major concern of many social studies teachers is whether students have the requisite skills associated with social studies education and whether they can apply them. As a result, much instructional time and space within the textbook is devoted to skill development. Within this literature unit, however, students were able to demonstrate and/or refine their own skills and knowledge. In this section of the paper, I present several examples of these skills and knowledge.

Map-reading skills. One of the skills that emerged within student groups without teacher assistance was related to map-reading skills as students were reading *Number the Stars*. During the instructional component of the lesson for this book, the classroom teacher, Laura Pardo, had frequently modelled using the map during whole class discussions. Often, during such interactions and in answering student questions, she would step to the map and point to countries pertinent to the discussion. This instructional use of the map was often mirrored during student interactions. For example, during one Book Club discussion students became interested in how far escaping Jews might have to swim from Denmark to Sweden. The following interaction took place:

Bart:	All right. Why? Why? I know why they would like to be free, but how could they swim? Wouldn't they drown if they tried to swim all the way across there?
Martisse:	It's not very far.
Bart:	Every inch is about a hundred mi...about a thousand miles.
Martisse:	I know.
Bart:	How could they swim at least a 1000 miles?

Martisse: They might get a boat.

Lissa: It ain't even an inch. It is only about this big (Measuring with her fingers).

Roger: Oh God! There's a lot to cross that.

Lissa No. They have...

Bart: Look it. Come here (Going to the map at the board).

Lissa: (Joining Bart at the map) On the map it is only about that big, not even an half of an inch.

Martisse: (From her seat) The map's not for real. The map is just up there telling you what it, what it. (General noise as Martisse pauses for a few seconds.) Well they just, well, you probably have to have a boat to walk, not to walk but to ride across that water. I think. Now wouldn't you have to have a boat? I think. Yes!

When the question arose about how far it actually was from Denmark to Sweden, Bart used the Book Club time to check a map to determine whether the characters could indeed swim. At first, Martisse did not seem convinced the distance between the two countries was very far and questioned the reliability of the representation of the distance on the map. However, after considering Bart's and Lissa's corroboration at the map, she altered her thinking and maintained they would need a boat. After this, one of the researchers in the classroom observed this conversation among the students gathered at the map. When she saw they did not seem to remember how to calibrate distance on a map, she joined them and provided a brief lesson on the use of the legend so that they could determine how far it was from Denmark to Sweden. Thus, a topic spawned by student interest led to a brief lesson on map reading.

This example provides evidence that children used their discussion groups to find answers of their own to specific questions if they had the required skills. Bart and Lissa both illustrated they were following the teacher's lead by going to the map when they had questions information on the map could answer. Further, they demonstrated they could find some information on their

own and present this information to their groups. At the same time, they reflected that some map-reading skills needed review.

Social studies teachers are often criticized for providing students with only basic skills without spending sufficient time for students to develop norms, critical thinking, and knowledge of their own thinking processes. As this example illustrates, once some of the students have developed these skills, they are capable of using them to inform themselves and other students. Further, brief mini-lessons can help children review and/or refine skills as they need them to understand other material. Such a circumstance places skills within authentic tasks and demonstrates to children that such knowledge can help them answer their own questions.

Knowledge of cultural differences. In addition to various skills, students might need factual knowledge about many different aspects of life to understand issues presented within historical fiction set during and after World War II. Later in this paper I discuss how students' interest in cultural differences between the Japanese and American cultures surfaced in their discussions. While I use these later examples to provide support for a disposition related to social studies education, I will use one example here to demonstrate that a conversation revolving around a Japanese custom illustrated how students could teach other students.

One cultural event referenced in *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* is the Peace Day Carnival, a custom celebrating the memory of those who died in the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Sadako was excited about the carnival, so it sparked some of the students' interest enough that it became a topic of conversation. Students were using their own experiences with "carnival" to construct the vision of a county fair; however, Lissa challenged this within the group.

Lissa: You guys know somethin'? They didn't, it wasn't at the roller coaster, they didn't have it.

Bart: Fair.

Lissa: On the sixth, / a [on on August sixth,

Bart: [Why else would they want to go to the fair, then?

Lissa: No, on August sixth. It's a [memorial day. (Answering Bart's question.)

Chris: [Memorial day .

Lissa: Because they got killed that day and they and they go around every day that every..

Chris: August sixth

Lissa: Every August sixth in the year they do that.

Seemingly based on the information provided in the book, Lissa used this segment of the discussion to clarify for the group that the Peace Day Carnival was not an event similar to their own notions of a carnival. Instead, it is more like our own Memorial Day. Chris also supported Lissa's position during this interaction even though earlier he had represented the carnival much the same as Bart had done. Bart attempted to defend his own notion of a carnival at first but acquiesced as Lissa continued to present her point. Later in the conversation, he altered his position slightly to defend his example that included a more American notion of carnival. Therefore, in a very brief amount of time, Lissa was able to clarify for her group a cultural difference between Japan and the United States some of them had missed in their reading.

Knowledge of weapons. As these students continued to read, write, and discuss events surrounding the bombing of Japan during World War II, they used their Book Club discussions to focus on weapons. In an early discussion, Lissa began a segment referring to a book that described an atomic bomb.

Lissa: ...I have a book at home that says that atoms are are made out of a whole bunch of little things

Mondo: Nuah. It's a bomb...

Chris: It's a bomb that smells...

Mondo: It's like gas that..

Bart: Ooo gas (laughs)

Chris: That's what my grandfather died from leukemia.

Bart: It's a kind of gas that's ah / and you can't get it out of your stomach.

Martisse: Its called leukemia, jerk.

Chris: Leukemia? My grandfather died from it. // Something like that. / But see he didn't die from a gas. /

Lissa began this segment of the conversation by trying to share information she had found in another book in the classroom. Because of an apparent lack of sufficient knowledge among the other students about atomic weapons, her suggestion that atomic bombs consist of several small atoms was rejected by the group. Instead of pursuing the information she introduced, they called upon their own assumptions, namely that bombs consist of smelly gases. Perhaps because none of the other students had knowledge to share, they did not pursue this topic at this time. Instead, Bart attempted fifth-grade humor with a reference to gas. Then, Chris, making a connection to the main character's grandmother, introduced the fact that his grandfather died of leukemia. Seemingly, most members of the group did not appear prepared to discuss this aspect of weapons at this time. However, later, during the same discussion, Lissa led the group into taking up the question of the bomb again.

Lissa: But why did they call the bomb a thunderbolt?

. . .

Martisse: Yea

Mondo: Cause what if a thunderbolt hit, cause when it lands

Bart: [Listen up,

Mondo: [it makes some thunder.

Bart: I'm talking, 'cause lightening has.// rit.. lightening is very high in electricity and so is a bomb.

Lissa: And its like, its like,

Bart: [And they're both just...

Lissa: [its faster than the speed of light.

Mondo: No not that fast. (laughing)

Bart: ...thunder more than a million times.

Lissa: It makes a, it makes a, it makes a mushroom-shaped cloud.

Bart: Right.

Lissa: That's what happened. I saw it in the book the same story (hitting the desk),

Bart: [Yep

Lissa: [I saw it in my book and it, it made a [mushroom-shaped cloud...

Bart: [Mushroom-shaped like,like

Lissa: ...and it killed almost every one around.

Bart: Yup like that. (Moving his hands up, illustrating an explosion.)

Lissa: No it goes like this. It goes shh... (Moving her hands higher in the air and tracing the form of a mushroom.)

Bart: Yea that's what I did I went like... (Moving his hands like before except in a more exaggerated way.)

Chris: When the bomb hit poof!

Bart: The bomb could travel, the gas could travel up, 'cause when the wind, 'cause when the gas is in the air the wind blows it and it goes to country to country to country and they all die.

As before, Lissa began the discussion about atomic bombs, but, instead of presenting information she learned, thus, presenting herself as an informer, she began with a question, eliciting other students' ideas. Her changing tactic seemed to foster greater participation since Bart appeared more receptive to contributing to the interaction.[7] However, Lissa did not refrain from

telling what she had learned through additional reading. Instead, she provided Bart some time to tell what he knew then added to his answer. As a result, students used this time to attempt to explain what happened when the atomic bomb exploded. While still not having all the information they perhaps should have and maintaining their own beliefs about the bomb (see Bart's reference to gas again), they were able to reconstruct what happened during an atomic explosion. Because reading the books about Japan had increased her interest, Lissa sought out other materials about atomic bombs and read them. Thus, she was able to inform the group. Although it's unclear where Bart gained his information, he revealed later that his own grandmother had been in Japan during the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Perhaps he was able to draw on information he heard at home. At any rate what does seem clear is that the slight delay between Lissa's earlier comment and her changed tactic seemed to provide Bart time to prepare mentally so that he could contribute to this discussion. With this new knowledge from both Lissa and Bart, the group was able to reconstruct what happened when the bomb dropped. Students used this group meeting to pursue knowledge of weapons. They could do this on their own because: (a) the necessary materials were present so that students could read more on their own and (b) individual students had time to gather their thoughts so they could contribute ideas.

Dispositions and Capabilities

In addition to domain-specific knowledge, students used Book Club interactions to provide themselves with experiences with the other levels of knowledge Nickerson (1988) identified. Developing these required opportunities to explore content which might led to student cultivation of these higher order knowledge domains. Newmann (1991) argues that there are particular dispositions and capabilities which seem to require these higher domains that are unique to social studies education: (a) empathy, (b) abstraction, (c) inference, (d) evaluation and advocacy, and (e) critical discourse that students should develop. For purposes of this paper, let us examine empathy as one criterion pursued throughout the literature unit focused on books set during World War II. There may be many ways for students to develop these within a classroom; therefore, only the

following three examples are pursued: (a) student identification with a character, (b) exploration of cultural similarities and differences, and (c) pursuit of a fictionalized situation in which students have to make decisions real people confronted at various points in history.

Identification with Main Characters. Throughout the reading of various literary selections, students chose to identify with specific characters. While many students frequently made references in their reading logs to events, traits, and problems found in the texts and relevant to specific characters, they made fewer explicit connections during their Book Club meetings, perhaps illustrating they did not want or know how to use their discussion time for this. One exception was Martisse. Even in the very first discussion about the novel, *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, Martisse chose to introduce a section of the book with which she could identify. This part of the story described an argument between Sadako and her mother.

Martisse: About the story I have, (Reading her log) her ma she said um she ran out in the street and she said, "I'm going to this carnival." And then her ma said, she said, "I like the carnival (Undecipherable. Something about running.) Her ma said, "You'll be um sad like that and it's not a carnival. It's a memorable day and so many people come, // your grandma died in, of that bomb because the gas . . .comes out and you get leukemia and some people still got leukemia now.

Chris: Yup, my grandfather died of that.

Martisse: And um...

Chris: Seriously, I'm not lying.

Martisse: and uhm, uhm, she said, "I like the carnival." Her mom said, "You don't wanna be talking like that because your grandma died in that bomb with leukemia.

Martisse selected a section of the text with which she could identify--an disagreement between a ten-year-old and her mother. However, within the text, Sadako's mother chastises her for referring to the memorial event as a carnival which does not show the required respect for the dead. In response to this Sadako answers, "But I do respect Oba chan...I pray for her spirit every

morning. It's just that I'm so happy today." In the original text, there is no argument between Sadako and her mother, only a reference to their differing perspectives on the event. In contrast, Martisse's description is of an argument that ensues as a result of Sadako's reference to the memorial event as a carnival. In Martisse's account, Sadako runs from the house, defiantly saying, "I like the carnival." She has constructed her own rendition of this event, perhaps to match more closely with the American culture in which ten-year-old girls and their mothers do argue. Because of this elaboration, it is clear that Martisse has selected a section of the text with which she can empathize.

None of the Book Club members chose to pursue Martisse's contribution about the interaction between Sadako and her mother. Instead, Martisse's reference to Sadako's grandmother and leukemia reminded Chris of his grandfather's illness and subsequent death which was like Sadako's grandmother, thus illustrating how another student was identifying with the characters but in a different way. However, even though Chris made statements about this in another Book Club meeting, neither he nor his peers chose to talk about it in depth. Despite the fact that others did not seem interested in topics exploring specifics related to the main character, in a subsequent meeting, Martisse again referred to a section of the book about Sadako with which she seemed to be able to identify.

Martisse: Okay well, well my, I said page page 15 and I wanted to read that to you guys. I said, it said (reading) "When the family started out, the air was already warm and just hung over the busy streets. Sadako ran a head of the house of her best friend Chizuko, the two had had have been friends since kindergarten, Sadako was sure that they would always be as close to pine needles on the same twig" . . . And the reason why I picked that because I like more people that are friendly and they have more friends. / The the things we have in common is runnin' fast, and bein' on time 'cause I like Sadako.

Martisse again chose to share a section of the book that dealt specifically with Sadako and her interactions with others. She stated explicitly that she wanted to talk about this because she

could identify with Sadako. Drawing on the reference to the friendship between Sadako and Chizuko, she noted that she liked friendly people. In addition, she also stated both she and Sadako liked running fast and being on time. As in the previous Book Club meeting, though, none of her peers chose to discuss this further.

Students continued to make log entries that demonstrated how they were identifying with characters in the books, but they rarely mentioned these entries for Book Club discussions. The teacher noted this and attempted to foster greater discussion of the characters' experiences in more depth by asking students to place themselves in the same circumstances as the characters. For example, in one of the opening chapters of *Number the Stars*, the main characters, Annemarie and Ellen, are confronted by Nazi guards. The teacher's specific log prompt asked students how they thought they would feel it they had been stopped by the guards. During Book Club, Bart and Martisse showed how they tried to do this.

Bart: I think that they felt the two soldiers were mean. / And I think that the two girls felt that the soldiers were mad. And shouldn't hang around them, and maybe those two girls, Mary Ann and Ellen thought they should not hang around them because they had a bad attitude. And I drew a picture of the guards on the side walk, saying 'halt' and I drew the girls hair in the air running. I tried to make this as realistic as I could.

Martisse: I thought the girls didn't think nothing of it because they, I know they seen them. I know when they seen the people up in there now, I didn't think they thought nothin' of them because there when they wouldn't tell their ma, they didn't all of them had a different story to tell. I didn't think they, just thought nothing of the guard because...

Both Bart and Martisse described what they thought the characters were thinking. However, two interesting aspects of this example are worth noting. First, neither child seemed capable of imagining what it might be like to be stopped by Nazi guards. This was not surprising since they have had no prior experience living in an occupied country. Thus, they described how students confronting any authority figure, say the building principal or an angry parent, might

react. This is indeed reasonable given their own prior experiences.

The second aspect to note is that neither description prompted further discussion within the group. Bart's contribution was "answered" by Martisse beginning to share her ideas. In similar fashion, another group member, Anthony, followed Martisse by telling the group what he thought the main characters were thinking. Therefore, it would appear that children did not want to use their Book Club time to discuss their own identification with main characters. As a result, group members were not encouraged to contribute responses that stemmed from their identification with main characters since they received little or no feedback from other group members. This probably limited this type of response considerably.

Empathizing with cultural differences. *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* presents contemporary American children with examples of several cultural differences between themselves and Japanese children of the same age. In addition, the book is set in Japan in the 1950s so there is a time difference as well. Because Japanese folklore is central to this book, students chose to use Book Club discussion time to explore Japanese customs and beliefs. This exploration demonstrated how the children were trying to identify with the main character and make connections between her culture and their own. Three images presented early in the book led many of the group members to present topics of conversation regarding these beliefs: (a) the superstitious belief that spiders bring good luck, (b) the custom of sending lanterns down the river to commemorate the dead, and (c) the yearly Peace Day Carnival, also to commemorate the dead. The Peace Day Carnival was discussed above; therefore, this section will include data referring to the other two.

A topic that emerged in one of the first Book Club discussions was a reference in chapter one about spiders bringing good luck. This notion caught Bart's interest perhaps because of an event in class. During the instructional component that day, a spider did indeed walk past Bart while the class sat on the rug in literacy corner. While several boys were interested in the spider, the teacher told them to leave it alone. All but Bart did as the teacher suggested and redirected their

attention to her. In contrast, Bart continued to play with the spider and eventually picked it up and took it to the window to let it go, much like Sadako had done with a spider in the book. Later, during their Book Club meeting, Bart demonstrated he wanted to use their group time to explore this because he entered this superstitious belief as a topic of discussion.

Bart: Why, um, why is // why is the spider good luck if it walks past you, past your path? // Anybody? //

Chris: Well,

Bart: Anybody know?

Martisse: Maybe they just use that...

Chris: Yea, as an excuse in the book.

Bart: (Answering his own question.) Or maybe that happened to someone an, and something good happened the same day so they said that. (Seems to be agreeing with Martisse and Chris) (Book Club Transcript, October 2, 1990)

Bart introduced his topic in the form of a question that none of the group members seemed prepared to answer. He appeared to be placing himself within the context of the book, hoping that he, too, might gain good luck since the spider walked past him that morning and he let it go. However, the students do not seem prepared to enter this as a topic for small-group discussion. Perhaps because most superstition is grounded in belief that cannot be explained or is closely related to cultural beliefs, group members seemed unable to pursue the conversation by answering his question. Therefore, since Martisse and Chris seemed willing to dismiss this as a device in the book, Bart attempted to answer his own question with a theory probably close to the origin of the belief; that is, "something good happened the same day" people remembered a spider crossing their path. By answering his question in this way, Bart seemed to have made connections between this cultural belief and his own experience. However, he did not seem satisfied with this answer since he reintroduced the topic a few moments later.

Bart: I would like to see if a spider walked past my path was on the rug, the spider walked past my path and I tried to pick it up and I picked it up and

dropped it / I let it outside and I wanted to see if it's really good luck...that's why I put it down. (Book Club Transcript, October 2, 1990)

In this second section, Bart revealed to his group part of the reason for his interest in this topic was the spider on the carpet during instruction. His comments revealed his curiosity about whether he would be the recipient of good luck. As before, however, Bart was the only group member who seemed interested in this superstition. After several minutes of discussion on other topics, Bart again brought up superstitious belief, except this time, he met with more success.

Bart: The other idea is I would like to talk about Book Club. It's at the bottom page. (Hitting his desk.) You know, sometimes I will read if a black cat walks past your path you get [bad luck.

Chris: [Bad luck.

Bart: And if [you squish a....

Chris: [And you should go the other way. (This comment appears to be in response to the mention of a black cat crossing in front on someone.]

Lissa : [Not true because I have a black cat.

Bart: [Yup. (seemingly in response to Chris's comment) And, and if you squish a spider it will rain. (Makes his voice go high and sing-song like)

Lissa : It will not rain because I squished a spider and it didn't rain the next day. (Makes voice like Bart's)

Martisse: I know. It didn't even rain that day. That's just a [superstition.

Chris: [Superstition

Lissa : Well, it rained the day before.

Martisse: Even if you had a black cat cross your path...

Chris: No.

Bart: I had bad luck when that happened once, I swear.

Chris: They do say black cats <u>are</u> bad luck.

Martisse: They're not.

Lissa : They aren't, 'cause I [have a black.

Bart: [We're not supposed to be arguing. We're supposed to be saying stuff on the thing. (Sounds angry or frustrated.)

For the third time, Bart initiated some discussion about superstitious beliefs except this time he drew upon superstitions the rest of the group knew something about--black cats and killing spiders. While this did indeed foster more discussion than his previous attempts, it did not include the Japanese superstition about spiders mentioned in the book. Martisse and Lissa debated the more familiar superstitions, calling on their own personal experiences to refute the notion. Chris balanced his own ideas between the girls' position and Bart's. Finally, Bart dismissed the topic, stating they should not be arguing. This ended any further discussion about this superstitious belief, but Bart included it again in a subsequent log entry. He wrote, "when she was sitting down a spider walked past her and she said it was good luck" perhaps indicating his continued interest in the topic. So it would seem that Bart wanted to use his group's discussion to bolster his hope that he would receive good luck; however, the group chose to discuss the authenticity of such belief.

This example illustrates that often the group did not pursue the same goals. In this instance, Bart seemed to want answers about superstitious belief. However, his group could not offer satisfactory explanations. Even though the group was not able to resolve his questions about the origin of this superstitious belief, Bart remained persistent until the group did engage it as a topic of conversation. He accomplished this by drawing on their own experiences. Even though this did not seem to get the response Bart seemed interested in, he was successful in directing the topic of conversation for a period of time. At the same time, by getting the other students to remember their own experiences, Bart undermined his goal of having some reinforcement to his hope that he would have good luck. He then dismissed the topic, saying they should not argue. By doing so, all but Bart, seemed able to dismiss the notion that spiders brought good luck as superstitious belief, and as such, they did not seem interested in pursuing further.

A second cultural difference which emerged during Book Club discussion was the custom

of sending candles down the river to commemorate those who died during the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Student interest in this custom sparked a Book Club discussion in which many group members contributed to the construction of the practice. Lissa introduced the topic, but other group members contributed to the discussion.

Lissa: Uhm, I think its neat that they put the the lan, the paper lanterns in the water.

Bart: That, yeah I forgot to tell [you...

Chris: [Oh, yeah.]

Bart: [...they put paper lanterns in the water [that's for their grave.

Mondo: [For their grandma.

Bart: Their grave, because on Karate Kid, [the,

Mondo: [Yeah, they done it]

Bart: [the Japanese

Mondo: [They done it,

Bart: [and they did that too in the water *Karate Kid Part 3.*

Mondo: Yea, but they done it around the [circle.

Chris: [a circle.

Mondo: They did it in the ocean.

Bart: A river.

Mondo: A river.

Chris: Yea and they made,...and they were like candles.

Martisse: Yea

During this section of the conversation, several children contributed what they knew about the custom, much of which came from the movie *The Karate Kid, Part Three*. What is interesting to note is that none of the children seemed to understand the purpose for the custom. They described it in more detail than the book, perhaps because of the visual memory of the movie, but

they did not indicate whether they understood the purpose for the Japanese custom. As further evidence that the children could describe the practice but did not know its purpose, Chris later wrote in his log that he thought the author could improve the book by explaining this custom. He wrote, "Whey did they sind candle down the river" indicating that perhaps he still did not understand the purpose for the ceremony. Therefore, their purpose seemed to be to demonstrate what they knew about the custom, but they appeared satisfied with a description based on the movie. Unfortunately, they did not seem to know enough to explain the purpose of the custom.

While students noted these cultural differences early in their log entries and during discussions, they became less interested in them as they progressed through the novel. Their third log entries, completed before reading the third and fourth chapters of *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, were the last ones to note any cultural differences. One reason the pursuit of cultural differences might not have continued to be a purpose was that they were not satisfied with the answers they provided one another within the group. None of the children understood the superstition regarding spiders or the custom of sending lanterns down the river. Perhaps this might have been an example of questions that could have been better answered during total class discussion. Of course, another reason for this switch away from cultural differences might be that as the plot revolved more around Sadako and her fight with leukemia, there were fewer references to cultural events and more to the main character. Further, as they read more about Sadako, they were more capable of identifying with her as a ten-year-old child and less concerned with the differences in her life. Perhaps this caused students to want to use Book Club for discussions about Sadako and not to discuss the differences between cultures. Despite this, these transcripts demonstrated that the students were selecting sections of the texts that elicited their efforts to identify with the character and her culture.

Fictionalized Accounts. While children may develop empathy with characters as a result of reading texts describing events crucial to the lives of others, this is often not sufficient. The level of empathy students demonstrated in their groups remained connected to events these students

could find within their own lives, that is, interactions between children and their parents, superstitions, and holidays. Occasionally, teachers find they need to construct specific activities to encourage thinking that helps students in their efforts to place themselves within some of the more difficult situations described within the book. One way to help students develop empathy is to propose a predicament they must attempt to solve by placing themselves in someone else's circumstance.

In the fourth-fifth-grade split classroom, the teacher, Deb Woodman, confronted the issue of prejudice as represented within the novel *Number the Stars*. Many elementary children do experience prejudice in their day-to-day lives and this was undoubtedly true for many of the children in this ethnically-diverse school. However, few had thought about it in an abstract way. That is, if they themselves were prejudiced, they probably had adopted attitudes from parents and other significant adults in their lives. If they experienced prejudice themselves, they could not necessarily get sufficient distance to consider what prompted such behavior and how they might combat it. That is, they had not had an opportunity to objectify prejudice. Therefore, to help them consider the situation in Nazi-occupied Denmark during World War II, the teacher set up the following problem for them to write about, think about, and discuss.

Before class began, the classroom teacher met privately with two African-American students, Randy and Helena, asking them to act out a scenario for the class. Within this scenario, the king of an unnamed state had decided to take all children with blue eyes to some kind of camp. The two students dramatized the reactions between two children living within this state.

Randy: Have you heard the bad news?

Helena: What news?

Randy: The king is going to take all of the children with blue eyes to some kind of camp.

Helena: You're kidding! I have friends with blue eyes!

Randy: So do I. What should we do?

After the students in class observed this interaction, Deb asked them to consider that they all had friends with blue eyes who would be taken away to a camp. Once they had had sufficient opportunity to think about this, she asked them to write in their reading logs what they thought they could do about this situation. After they had finished writing, they met in Book Club to share their ideas. Class discussions revealed that students demonstrated varied abilities to empathize with this situation. Some group members used the discussion as a spring-board to further ideas, but their peers seemed less willing or able to use their discussion time for this.

A section of transcript from one sample group illustrates how some students were less able to move beyond their own situations to consider what it might be like for one aspect of the community to suffer from extreme prejudice. Not surprisingly, this group consisted primarily of Caucasian children. In the following interaction, Mei, a Vietnamese student, pressured Jean and Leanne to reconsider the reality of their recommendations. Mei, a relative newcomer to this country from Vietnam, had experienced trying to escape from an occupied country. She challenged her peers as they outlined their reactions to the decree from the king. Jean decided she would hide in her own house, assuming she could find a place no one could find her. Leanne, taking a similar stance, stated she would run to her brother in another state.

Mei: Jean, if you had a blue eye, what do you do?

Jean: I would run away, as far away from this state.

Mei: And you don't and you don't have any money to run away or to go.

Jean: I'd go hide in the attic or I'd go hide under the, in the basement.

Mei: Basement? And if they go in the house and go in [the...

Jean: [No, because there's gonna be a spot in the basement where they'll never find me.

Mei: Oh, and what do you think, Leanne?

Leanne: I don't know. I guess put a veil on my eyes and

sneak on a train to live with my brother. He lives in Minnesota and I'll never get caught.

Mei: And you, you go with your brother?

Leanne: Yeah

Mei: Now, you don't have any money to go there, to go over there.

Leanne: My mom would tell him

Mei: And you left your mom there and you go, and if, uhm, later, you come back and visit your mom?

Leanne: Yes, after the king got shot.

Mei: When you come back and visits your mom and how about if they see you?

Leanne: I won't come back until that dingbat king got shot. I won't come back until blue-eyed people are accepted.

Jean and Leanne offered suggestions that many adults confronting the possibility of Nazi occupation also considered; however, neither of them considered the realistic problems Mei did, namely the cost of travel, the lack of preparation time to create a hiding place, or the fact the running away potentially means never being able to return. Perhaps because they had never experienced the need to run from their homes, these American-born children could not conceive of a situation in which they could not get away if they really wanted to. Of course, this was also true of many European adults reacting to the advancing Nazi threat. Further, Jean and Leanne did not seem willing to engage in a conversation about it; choosing instead to mere answered Mei's questions. In contrast, Mei, who had lived through a similar experience, tried unsuccessfully to get them to see their plans were unrealistic.

Another group also proposed actions that paralled those of people living within Europe during World War II. Helena began the discussion proposing that she would go to the king to discuss his decree. Randy supported this but also contributed an additional action.

Helena: Well, I think we should make a serious visit to the kind, and try to talk to him about what's going on

and try to, maybe we can probably do something like, try to talk to him in a calm, calm, very very calm way because he's the king of all.

Randy: That's what I'd say.

Helena: Get something started off, but on a different subject, and then sort of rush right into the subject about the blue eyes say, ask him, like uhm, "Why are you gonna take them away because they're still our normal people, and after all we your people? They've all been gone which is a lot of us with blue eye. It's gonna be just a little of us left to uhm, guard you." 'cause remember they said people are guarding 'im. And say, uhm, a lot of people,

anybody never had blue eyes, and took a lot of people there to uhm the camps, people with blue eyes would be hard for them to uhm guard him. Maybe it was just all children.

Randy: That's what I'd say. Uhm, I said that we should, if that won't work, I'd probably try to get them out of the country, or try to resolve the problem and to talk to the king, or most people with blue eyes would probably think it's no fair.

This group appeared to use the Book Club time to try to imagine what they might do in such a situation. Much like the leaders of Europe trying to cope with Hitler, Helena decided that talking with this fictionalized king would help eliminate the problem. Masked within this, though, was a veiled threat. "If you do not let these people go, harm may come to you because your people will no longer continue to guard you." Randy agreed with this, then added that he would try to smuggle blue-eyed children out of the country to safety. Again, this was the solution many Europeans attempted during the Nazi occupation. Therefore, after reading about and discussing issues related to war, these elementary children posed solutions that many adults confronting similar real-life situations also posed, demonstrating that they could indeed empathize with others in a predicament very different from any that they had known.

Moving beyond the texts. Empathy is a quality that takes time and reflection to develop.

After several weeks reading, writing, and discussing texts set during World War II, some students demonstrated that, on their own, they were able to move beyond cultural differences and the minor aspects of the characters with which they could identify to thinking about much larger issues associated with war and its impact on people. One month into the unit focused on Japan, the following interaction occurred within one group.

Bart:	I wrote about survival too //// and I wrote about Japanese. I was speaking about Japanese people and their culture. That's what I was really thinking about. But I wrote... (unclear Chris talking but too softly) I know, I know but I was thinking, if you can't bomb Americans,
Chris:	It's war. They bombed us and we bombed 'em back.
Bart:	I know, but still.
Chris:	(Says something, the tape doesn't pick up.)
Lissa:	Yeah, / but the Americans had the the war.
Bart:	Yeah, but if Japan bombs uhm a part that's not uhm, if Japan this part we don't have the right to go back and bomb them. Two wrongs don't make a right.
Chris:	Japan bombed Pearl Harbor.
Bart:	I know, but still,
Chris:	Americans had to go bomb them back.

For the first time, Bart introduced the notion of survival. Within his first turn, he synthesized previous ideas the group had been discussing throughout the reading of these books, namely the Japanese people and their culture. However, he showed the advancement of his own thinking by moving these ideas beyond the superficial characteristics of superstitions, customs, and personal likes to the survival of a nation. While Chris's comments were frequently lost due to his lowered voice, he appeared to be adopting an alternative side, proclaiming that the Japanese government was wrong to attack the United States and thus needed to pay the consequences. The two boys had taken alternative perspectives on World War II. This debate continued but took a

slight turn to compare the then current international situation surrounding the mounting tensions between the United States government and Iraq.

Bart: It doesn't make sense to go back and bomb them. That's like President Bush //

Child: (Someone outside the group says something to Bart, but the tape doesn't pick it up.

Bart: (As if to someone outside the group) Wait. (Then as if to the group) I know. He gets a mistake, like really uhm / if they if they make a move on us, we have a war. Two wrongs don't make a right. That's wrong. / I would saying / run me over, if they do something...

//

Martisse: Bomb them back.

Lissa: No!

Bart: No! Just <u>leave</u>, leave it. [Just leave.

Lissa: [Let it be.

Bart: If they keep on doing it we'll have to do somethin' about it.

Mondo: Well, they're just killin' our guys.

Bart: What about these American people there too ha? There <u>are</u> American people there. So if we bomb em...

Martisse: Bomb yourself.

Bart: I'll do it. He might let go. And let him take over 'cause it's got nothing to do with us.

Bart adopted an anti-war stance, arguing that war is wrong and does not solve anything. Even though he appeared to waiver when he stated. "If they keep on doing it we'll have to do somethin' about it," he supported his original argument by noting that Americans live in other countries and could be hurt in any war. While Bart took the lead in this discussion, all of the other members stressed their own diverse perspectives on the morality of war.

This section of the Book Club meeting illustrated how the children had moved beyond the superficial aspects of the Japanese culture and the war to more profound issues related to making

decisions about initiating a conflict. This level of discussion seemed predicated on their ability to read, write about, and discuss issues related to World War II over the course of time. Their discussions, beginning with a focus on cultural differences and their own similarities with the main characters, seemed to help facilitate this transition.

What Do the Transcripts of the Book Club Meetings Tell us About the Use of Literature in Helping Elementary Children Think about Social Studies Issues?

As the school year began, these elementary students initiated their participation in a new literature-based reading program. While the major focus of this unit was the development of their reading capabilities, they also demonstrated that they saw as one purpose of their group the exploration of topics of interest to them. Many of these were related to social studies issues. The two questions addressed in the study were: (1) What topics will students be able to pursue as they engage in opportunities to read and discuss trade books which focus on social studies issues and (2) which issues are better handled through instruction led by the teacher? Findings from this study revealed four things: (a) students often introduced issues included within social studies curricula based on their own interests, (b) students were capable of expanding ideas within the Book Club groups, and (c) teachers need not dominate student interactions to insure they comprehend important issues. However, findings also revealed that instructional support could have furthered their understanding of some key issues related to social studies education.

Issues Students Were Able to Pursue on Their Own

First, students used Book Club discussion to demonstrate not only their social studies skills and knowledge, but also how these applied while reading narrative texts. They illustrated that if they had appropriate supplementary materials and some basic skills, they could use their small-group discussions to answer factual questions that arose while reading and/or discussing texts. Lissa and Bart together used their map-reading skills to decide whether characters could indeed escape occupied Denmark by water, and Lissa read other sources about atomic bombs. Therefore, findings from this study revealed that teachers can foster greater usage of acquired skills

and knowledge by allowing students some freedom within group situations in which they may see a need to apply their skills and follow through by using them. One example of such an authentic situation is to have children read narrative texts in which they can become engaged in the plights of the main characters.

Second, this study supports Levstik's (1990) findings. She found that through the use of student groups, learners had several opportunities to revisit ideas regarding historical events and people. As a result, students adjusted their ideas, not just because of the books they read or the instructional focus, but also because of their own discussions. The students described in this study demonstrated similar tendencies. As the result of reading and discussing historical fiction, they used Book Club as a forum to include both cultural differences and individual similarities between themselves and the characters as interesting items to discuss. In addition, they brought up issues related to war and weapons. As their transcripts revealed, they did not need the teacher to initiate these. The events in the books, the focus on open-ended response in pursuit of personal interests, and the Book Club setting were sufficient. Further, they not only introduced these topics for discussion, but, given time to think through their ideas, they also were able to expand them. For example, Bart continued to pursue the relationship between the spider and good luck until his peers convinced him they saw this only as superstition unrelated to their own experiences. Also, Lissa reintroduced the topic of weapons after Bart and the others had had some time to consider it. During this second interaction, the students were able to construct together what happened when an atomic bomb exploded. Therefore, both of these examples illustrate that students could expand topics of interest in their student-directed groups. While their discussions were guided by their entries in their reading logs and these entries were suggested by teacher prompts, the teacher did not need to be a participant for students to discuss relevant issues.

Where Students Could Have Benefitted from Further Instructional Support

As with prior work (Levstik, 1990; Walker-Dalhouse, 1992), the findings from this study indicate that even though elementary children will pursue some aspects of a social studies

curriculum through the use of children's literature, there is more that can be done. While these fourth- and fifth-graders did benefit from these student-directed groups, there were issues that emerged that could have been clarified further with teacher help. For example, students could not explain sufficiently for one another the questions they had about cultural differences. Perhaps had there been appropriate supplementary materials within the classroom, they might have been able to answer these questions as they had the others. Also, the teacher could have provided additional information on Japanese customs and traditions within total class discussion. (In fact, both teachers did anticipate students' questions about the reference in the title to a thousand paper cranes. Each teacher not only explained this notion, but also invited a local woman of Japanese descent to visit the classes to teach the children how to make paper cranes. Perhaps a similar plan might have helped them understand better the custom of sending lanterns down the river and the superstition about spiders.)

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study of elementary children as they participated in a literature-based reading program revealed interesting findings regarding both the theory of social constructivism and the practical implications for the teaching of social studies.

Social Constructivist Perspective in an Elementary Classroom

When considering a social constructivist perspective and this study, two key important features emerge. First is Bakhtin's theory that meaning is constructed in social contexts. As group members interacted, they construct meanings unique to that group. For example, the two groups in Deb Woodman's class had read the same books and participated in the same total class discussions; however, when thinking about what to do with an arbitrary and prejudiced king, each group pursued different answers.

In addition to membership in small groups, each individual is also a member of other social groups in which meanings have also been constructed. Therefore, understanding and interpretation is unique for each individual, but also grounded within the current context. As Fish

(1980) noted, we are all members of a community of readers who share ideas, reactions, and beliefs. In these urban, elementary classrooms, students pursued topics of choice that included aspects of the main characters' lives, cultural differences, and issues related to war. As they continued to interact, either within one particular day or across days, students expanded their ideas, correcting one another's misunderstandings whenever possible. Often one student introduced an idea that others within the group helped to expand.

A second important feature to understanding the theoretical implication of these findings is Vygotsky's (1986) ideas that language develops thinking. As these children read and discussed the same texts, they began to develop shared understandings of events. In addition, they continued to read and reflect on issues raised in Book Club so that in later discussions they could further their own thinking and perhaps the thinking of other group members. Positions these children adopted were positions adults also took in similar situations. Because they were reading and discussing texts focused on the effects of war, the children were able to identify with the characters and empathize with their plights. This resulted from the language of their interactions. As students verbalized a response within Book Club, they needed to think about the ideas they had so that they could state them. Once made oral, their ideas were open to expansion and criticism, fostering further discussions. These additional comments or lack of them caused students to reconsider what they had introduced and make modifications as they thought necessary.

The reporting of these data might imply that the teacher in this classroom did little or nothing to prompt this interaction. Nothing could be further from the truth. The instructional design facilitated the development of student thinking. Instruction focused on what and how to share. Log entries encouraged pursuit of individual interests. Book Clubs were student-led, but directed by the teacher, leading to student interactions about ideas related to the book but of interest to them. All four components--reading, writing/representing, discussion, and instruction--focused on student development of ideas and feelings resulting from the reading of the texts.

Implications for the Classroom

One criticism reformers of traditional social studies instruction have is the targeted on the lack of opportunities for students to express their ideas. Results form this study indicate that students can benefit from interactions with one another, but they also need continued instructional support.

Students need an opportunity to express themselves orally. Such interactions allowed children to present their own, multiple interpretations of the texts without judgement of the teacher. The context of Book Club made it clear that they could pursue their own areas of interest. While the group sometimes chose to focus on clarifying events in the book, they also chose to pursue personal, affective response. Their interactions were not guided by a search for the "correct" answers for a test. At the same time, individual children did not simply follow the dictates of one dominant student. While some students might have dominated some discussions, each individual member continued to write about areas of interest and frequently challenged another about his or her ideas.

While students can indeed learn from one another within small student-directed groups, the teacher's role is not diminished. In addition to setting the instructional context, teachers also need: (a) to define the social studies curriculum as it pertains to the literature and (b) to monitor student-led discussions. The students in this study could have benefitted further with more specific instruction or additional books within the classroom that focused on cultural differences, Japanese customs, weaponry, etc. These teachers included trade books as part of their reading curriculum. They had expanded their classroom libraries to include some Japanese folk tales and other historic books. Therefore, for the reading aspect of the curriculum, they had found alternative texts to expand student thinking. However, they did not consider additional texts for the social studies issues. While not faulting the teachers in this study, perhaps one implication for teachers to consider is that children's literature, like all good literature, can take the reader on many, varied paths. If the teachers could have anticipated these, perhaps children could have answered more of

their own questions related to social studies issues. As the same time, such foresight on the part of the teachers requires sufficient subject matter knowledge to anticipate the various social studies issues that could relate to any one text. Many classroom teachers do not have such a knowledge base. Therefore, to successfully implement children's literature that enhances reading ability, but also abilities in other content areas, classroom teachers need considerable knowledge about the texts themselves and the areas of interests they might spark.

Teachers also need to monitor student-led discussions to record topics students are interested in pursuing. All group interactions are not the same in terms of dynamics or content (McMahon, 1992). While the children in this study chose to focus on topics that could be included within a social studies curriculum, discourse within various disciplines differ. How we talk about narrative texts in not the same as how we discuss issues of historical significance. The teachers in this study did provide instruction on how to discuss literature but not on how to articulate positions or form persuasive arguments. Further, because this was the first year of this literature-based reading program, the instructional focus was limited to issues related to reading and the study of literature. With closer monitoring and consideration of the social studies curriculum, teachers could also provide instruction on the types of discourse patterns associated with historical debate; therefore, providing students yet another way to read, think about, and discuss the same texts.

Concluding Comments

Providing students opportunities to respond to historical fiction enables them to develop their own ideas. This literature-based reading program provided students opportunities to interact in student-led, but teacher-directed, heterogeneous groups in which they shared their own questions and knowledge about Japan during World War II. Such opportunities allowed students time and means through which to record, review, and revise their developing thoughts and emotions evoked by text, thus making reading more personal, more meaningful, and more enlightening about history .

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